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ABSTRACT

This paper focusses on problems involved in adopting the newer modes of social science and professionalism. The complexities which precede these problems are recognized. It is mentioned that many recent entrants to these fields have made value commitments in their professionalism without very long detention at the portals of objectivity or neutrality. The concept of advocacy is discussed and comments presented on three problems faced by advocates. These are the problems of career and profession, the problem of cross-cultural and cross-class communication, and the problem of power. It is concluded that the views presented in this paper have two implications for advocates. First, to be maximally effective, local advocacy must look to national levels of resource allocation; and second, the mobilization of people for action in their own interest is the strategic centerpiece around which advocate's services are auxiliary. (Author)

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PROBLEMS OF ADVOCACY*

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Introduction

The last decade has witnessed an erosion in the two related models of social science neutrality and professional standards and self-regulation. In the case of social science neutrality the erosion has been dual: first, the possibility of "value-free" cultural work has been challenged, and among many, rejected; second, the desirability of allegedly "uncommitted" work has been questioned and charged with being covert or unconscious commitment to status quo values and arrangements.

Parallel to the erosion of the firmness of unanimity with which the model of value free social science was held, and in fact preceding it, have been new interpretations of professionalism in all of the human service fields. Here too the attack has been, basically, dual. First, the idea of the professional, self-regulating community as one which would necessarily serve clients best has been brought under attack by those who observe that self-regulation, as in medicine, quite frequently serves self-interest and in turn is sometimes or even frequently in opposition to client interest. The second aspect of the attack on conventional professionalism has focussed on the professional's alleged ability to know the interests of the client more adequately than the client does him or herself. All four of these issues are significant and in some ways unresolved. It is not clear how, for example, a partisan social science (or scientist) can remain open to disconfirming or uncomfortable facts; nor are many radical or committed social scientists content with a resolution of the problem of objectivity

which concludes that reality is necessarily or wholly dependent on the position or preference of a given observer. Similarly, there are obscure and technical aspects of many professional fields of which lay persons remain mystified, and cannot judge; and there are, one can imagine, instances in which a professional may indeed know what is in a client's interest more clearly than the client. Therefore, although this paper focusses on problems involved in adopting the newer modes of social science and professionalism, it is not written without recognition of the complexities which precede them. It is clear, however, that many recent entrants to these fields have made value commitments in their professionalism without very long detention at the portals of objectivity or neutrality. While their work is not value-free, neither is it problem-free. So we address here some of those problems.

Advocacy

For some scientists and professionals the socially determined focus of suffering, inequality, and injustice leads them to define, or want to define, their work in such a manner so as to advance the interests of these oppressed groups. Summarized most briefly, their analysis is that the privileged classes in modern society are well-served by the ordinary functioning of scholarship and social and health service; indeed, the analysis claims that such intellectual and professional work usually and certainly in the long run functions so as to more deeply entrench what is judged to be unjustified privilege and unconscionable oppression. Consciously or not this is a political, or politicized perspective, one which implicitly accepts a view of the society as stratified and conflict-laden around that stratification. Therefore an adversary process of social action and decision-making is appropriate;

and so, the idea of advocacy--in social science and service--has become current. The advocate, at the minimum, declares a commitment to serve the interests of his or her client; he or she may further submit to the direction of the client; and the advocate may also serve at the discretion of the client.

The commitment among these new professionals to the redress of inequity and the subordination of these professionals to the unequal occurs in relation to specific social and historical trends. Affluence, among other things, breeds among some a sense of the irrationality, the lack of material necessity for suffering. Consequently, it breeds guilt among the comfortable, who, since they see suffering which is not objectively or materially necessary, tell themselves, in the words of Phil Och's song, "There but for fortune go you and go I". Discussion of youth movements of the Sixties have emphasized this latter aspect of social movement participation as guilt. But, though this may be true--indeed we think it is--the critical aspect of advocacy is its proponents' focus--explicitly or implicitly--on the irrationality of the social arrangements which create or maintain suffering. This focus leads naturally enough to the notion that the exercise of expertise and rationality in the interests of the unequal will be a major element in the meliorationof their condition. Armed with what is after all a certain optimism, then, advocates in social science and the professions attempt to use their expertise in the interests of the oppressed.

In 1968 I observed the beginnings of an advocacy planning project in Chicago's West Side ghetto; earlier I had been involved in something called the Center for Radical Research in Chicago; and now I am doing research on advocacy in city planning. From these experiences as observer-researcher,

and as a participant I want to comment on three problems faced by advocates: these are the problems of career and profession, the problem of cross-cultural and cross-class communication, and the problem of power.

Career and profession:

For those in the so-called helping professions the primary problem involved in advocacy is, I would imagine, the structure of one's institutional employer, and the distribution of services. But for social scientists and planners--the groups with whom I have had contact--a rather different order of problem arises. Central here is the fundamental fact that these professionals are now part of more or less clearly defined career ladders, and these ladders are more or less sharply distinct from advocacy concerns. For the social scientist--either as graduate student or young untenured member of a faculty--relatively heavy expectations exist for professional output and achieved competency. The taking on of the professional identity brings these expectations. The management of career goals generally requires a great deal of one's finite time and energy. This becomes a problem for advocates because meeting the needs of underprivileged groups is not necessarily or even usually the kind of activity which can easily be used to meet other career commitments. In short, you get few points for service.

I can illustrate this with some examples from my Chicago experience. The Center for Radical Research was formed on the model of a summer project in which about fifty students would do research helpful to black and poor white community organizations involved in resistance to urban renewal and other projects in the city. The communication link between the organizations and the students involved delicate political tasks as this was just at the beginning of the current nationalist tone of the black community.

Supposedly, the community groups would define research needs and groups of students led by graduate students or teachers would try to help serve them. The task of leading these groups was a tremendous potential time burden. In my own case, that summer was to have been one of work on a Master's paper. What I discovered was that the kind of work required by graduate training was not going to be fulfilled through work in these community needs. For example, in one area a nascent tenants' group needed information as to who the large slumlords were. This information was useful to them, but not part of the kind of work which I could convert to academic or professional credit. Another group wanted to know about Mafia involvement in their neighborhood. Given the time and resources available extensive use of clipping files was the best we could do: but people in the community knew at least as much as we could find that way. In sum, the Center was a good experience for a group of students who were exposed to the city, an awesome drain on the energies of the so-called group leaders, and of very limited value to the communities.

In my current research a similar problem occurs. I am involved in a survey of advocate planners. Because my institute is quantitatively oriented; because the pressure on dissertations are for scientific rigor; because such studies are easier to fund than others this mode was used. Yet talk to as we interview advocates, their need emerges as one for detailed contextual case studies: how to do it, how others have done it. At a general level I hope our work will be helpful, but it is clear that many specific advocate's needs will not be met by our conventionally defined work.

The point, then, is clear. For a number of potential advocates--especially in research oriented fields--the orthodox professional career creates

demands which cannot be met with this work. To break with orthodoxy, to accept insecurity and disapproval, are key elements in one's ability to do successful work. And indeed, this is what we discover: the most effective advocate researchers are those guerrilla researchers not now involved with academia. The North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), the Africa Research Group (ARG), the Radical Education Project (REP), and the Brains Mistrust (BMT) are examples of this route.

One should point out, however, before leaving this topic, that as a certain number of sympathetic professionals begin to appear in a given field, critical mass can be reached: enough people to provide support, guidance, and employment can create sufficient social space to allow people to take this route. I believe this is beginning to occur in economics and sociology and psychology, but only a beginning.

Cross-cultural communication:

The second broad area of problems an advocate faces is that of cross-class and cross-cultural communication. In our current study of community planning about half the advocate planners indicate that class, race or cultural gaps between themselves and their clients create serious problems of trust and communication. Those who do not see this area as creating problems are much more likely to be members of minority groups themselves--that is, Chicano or Black.

Planners indicate that they use different strategies to attempt to overcome these barriers. One white planner, part of a firm, hired a black project director; another non-Spanish speaking planner who worked with a Chicano community said he carefully cultivated personal relationships with the community organizations' leadership. The general theme of advocates'

coping strategies though, is dual: on the one hand, many emphasize listening carefully and patiently to community members' grievances, criticisms, etc.; on the other hand, a number of planners emphasize the requirement of steady commitment and accomplishment. They point out that people trust you when they see you working for them through long periods of adversity.

As one goes over these interviews, though, the gap between the role of the educated professional and the lay community resident is of a kind not so easily solved. Good will and hard work, our respondents seem to be saying, will carry the outsider through these difficulties. My observational experience in Chicago, however, argues for the need for a different approach in addition.

In the community I observed, the initial open community meetings were called by the middle class educated leadership of the community. Acting as a steering committee of the community organization, they selected the planning firm and held meetings for the planners to explain their work and listen to the community. Throughout the first four or five of these sessions one could notice an interesting dynamic. The questions and arguments from the floor, directed to the planners who were sharing a stage-front table with the steering committee frequently appeared to assume that the planners' ideas were the city's policies. Thus, the residents attacked or defended as if the planners' ideas were the law. The notion of the planners as their employees had not yet become current. Moreover, the discussion revealed that the residents did not distinguish between a proposal which might or might not get implemented in an actual operating program. Briefly put, though nominally the members of an organization which had hired advocate planners, the residents did not know what the planning process involved. Furthermore, they responded to the advocates with much the same attitude as they would have

to the city's own employees. A clear need in this situation was an introductory session or series which walked people through the nature of the policy-making process on which they were embarked. As things turned out, the broadness of participation was not maintained, and the organization's functions gradually devolved upon its more sophisticated leadership.

Besides concluding that participation requires that people be given effective tools of participation--in this case, some knowledge of what a planner's job might be--there are other things to learn from the example.

White and black professionals are both apt to forget that minority ethnic communities, though concentratedly poor, are also diverse. Involuntary segregation and crowding produces, especially in many older black communities in inner city areas, significant class and educational diversity among residents. Thus, an understanding reached with leadership, which is apt to represent the most stable and professionally sophisticated stratum of the community, will not necessarily reach down to the poorer or less educated strata of the community. In the Chicago case this fact almost led to a strategic disaster.

At one point in the proceeding the planners mentioned the need for code enforcement in the largely apartment-house community. Now the economics of ghetto real estate are such that the owner of a small building without other significant holdings can rarely afford the investment required for preventive maintenance or rehabilitation; and financing is hard to get. Large real estate firms with good cash positions can generally afford this. At the meeting that night was a typical small owner of a slum apartment dwelling--a black resident--who began to attack the idea of code enforcement. As a

small owner his plight was understandable; his rhetoric, however, was not about the economic squeeze but about the evils of invasion of white inspectors. It was passionately nationalist in tone. For a while it appeared that opposition to the idea would be mobilized by this nationalist spirit. Eventually, however, the vast majority's interest--as tenants who wanted decent facilities--prevailed. This was a modest-sized class-conflict, and the existence of such differences within minority communities cannot be ignored.

Power:

An overarching problem advocates face is that of developing sufficient power to make a difference. For research professionals this is less pressing, for usually they are in a more auxiliary service role, not on the cutting edge of action. For the planners, though, the problem is significant--even, one might add, when they are not explicitly conscious of it. It seems fair to say that most advocates hope that the addition of their skills to a community's development process will help it in its struggle for constructive change. But the fact of the matter is that the mobilization of an urban community or neighborhood is but one step in a long chain of changes, actions, and strategies which might substantially alter the conditions of life of poor or minority peoples. To give just the flavor of this issue, consider the position taken by Leon Keyserling who has argued that if a full domestic-spending employment strategy had been followed in the Sixties, regardless of, or even instead of, the War on Poverty, poverty and associated problems of urban life would have been significantly alleviated.

One of the earliest of the advocate planners, Robert Goodman, has put it this way.

> ...within the present economic structure of our society, simply giving the poor more access to planning expertise doesn't basically change their chances of getting the same goods and services as wealthier citizens.

> ...Pluralist opportunities are therefore a necessary, but hardly sufficient, condition for real social equality. For such equality to occur, pluralism must be tied to a political ideology which deals directly with the means of equally distributing economic power.
>
> -After the Planners

These views have two implications for advocates, and are fitting places to close. First, to be maximally effective, local advocacy must look to national levels of resource allocation; and second, the mobilization of people for action in their own interest is the strategic centerpiece around which advocate's services are auxiliary.